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FRANK G. CARPENTER'S LETTER COSTA RICA HAS ONE OF THE FABLED TREASURE ISLANDS

ANCIENT GRAVE MOUNDS OF CENTRAL AMERICA BEING DUG OVER FOR GOLDEN GODS.

Quantities of Golden Idols Now Found in Costa Rica and Panama—The Hoards of the Buccaneers and Golden Madonna of Cocos—Lakes in Which Gold Is Buried—The Treasures of the Incas—The Pearls of the Western Pacific—Some Remarkable Finds—Black Pearls of the Gulf of California.

(Copyright, 1912, by Frank G. Carpenter.)

PUNTA ARENAS, Costa Rica, Nov. 2.—Costa Rica has one of the fabled treasure islands of the world. This is Cocos, which lies southwest of here in latitude 5 degrees 22 minutes and longitude 87 degrees 2 minutes. It is claimed that on the island is buried gold to the amount of millions of dollars. One of the treasures was carried there in 1720 at the time of the revolution in Peru when the people of Lima and Callao chartered the little vessel living at the wharves and escaped to Cocos with their plate, bullion and other valuables. They were chased by a Peruvian man-of-war, but outran it in the darkness. They landed 11 boatloads of treasure at Cocos amounting in value, it is said, all the way from \$50,000,000 to \$100,000,000. Among the objects was a life sized statue of the Holy Vir-

gin, made of solid gold, and there were smaller golden statues of St. Joseph, St. Peter and others. There was a great quantity of silver plate, and, in all, a vast treasure.

After burying this, the vessel started back to Peru, but on its way it met one of the revolutionary man-of-war and was captured. As a result every Peruvian on board was killed, and only two men, an Englishman and an American, were saved. His name was Thompson. This left the Englishman, a resident of Newfoundland named Keating, as the sole owner of the secret. Keating went home and a short time later started out two expeditions to get the treasure. In one of these his vessel was wrecked and in the other he and his crew were arrested at Panama and sent back home. He left

his charts, however, to his descendants, and some years ago they were still in the hands of one of them, a Mrs. Young, who was then living in Boston.

Hoards of the Buccaneers.

Another treasure buried on Cocos is said to have been left there by William Dampier, who blockaded Panama in 1684 and took during the year following a big treasure ship which was coming north from Peru, intending to send its silver and gold on horses across the isthmus to Porto Bello and thence to Spain. Dampier, it is alleged, buried six boatloads of silver on Cocos and made several trips there after that with smaller freight.

There is a third story which says that in 1821, during the revolution when the Central American colonies broke away from Spain, the native Spaniards living here in Costa Rica loaded a schooner with gold gems and silver plate and sent it to Cocos to be kept there until the troubles were over. They gave the treasures over into the hands of six men, each of whom had a chart of the exact place where the stuff was buried. One of these men was killed during the revolution and two others died from natural causes before it was over. When peace was restored the remaining three started for Cocos to bring back the wealth, but their boat was driven on the rocks of the island and all on board perished. That was about 1836.

Hunting the Treasure.

These facts have long been current in this part of the world and many people believe that the above-named treasures still exist there. The government of Costa Rica has given a number of permits to parties to hunt for them, and not long ago a squad of soldiers and a scientist in charge of the Costa Rican government survey went to Cocos accompanied by a Colorado man who claimed that he could hold a stick in his hand and that it would turn over and point down when he passed over gold. I have seen men looking for water in the mountains of Virginia using the forked limb of a peach or apple tree in much the same way. Well, the Colorado man's claim did not work on Cocos. I don't know what was the matter. He went there, but claimed he had not a fair trial.

Another set of treasure hunters came here about five years ago from England. I was at Panama at the time their boat was in the harbor. That expedition was headed by Earl Fitzwilliam, who is said to have an income of \$1,000,000 a year and to own 100,000 acres of land in Ireland. He had bought a yacht named the Veronique, and had come out with admiral Palliser, who at one time was the commander of the British fleet on the Pacific. The admiral had been sent to Cocos by the government some years before to investigate the claims of a man named Hartford, an Englishman, who had a concession from Costa Rica to hunt for this treasure. He was on the Imperieuse at the time, and he and his sailors did some digging and then went away. Palliser, however, was confident that the treasure existed, and he got the earl to put up \$500,000 to purchase this yacht and equipment. They had a full corps of men, including sailors and diggers. They came around through the Strait of Magellan and made the island all right. In looking for the treasure, however, they used dynamite, and in the explosion which followed the earl and the admiral were so badly injured by rocks that, to make a long story short, they went back to Panama with nothing but disgust for their pains.

Another party started out to look for this treasure was headed by a Newfoundland woman, the widow of a ship chandler. She went over to the Pacific and outfitted a ship from Victoria. Her captain was a man named Fred Hackett, and she had with her a transfer from Hartford of his permission from the Costa Rican government to search for treasure on Cocos, the understanding being that the latter was to have half of

the find. When she came to Cocos the island was inhabited by a cataway who was dressed like Robinson Crusoe. He had nothing on but skins of beasts, and he looked crazy. At first he could not speak, but after they had given him some whisky he told in broken language his story. He said he and others had had a concession from Costa Rica to search for this treasure, but that the others had become disgusted and left. He could not say how long he had been on the island. At first he had kept tally of the days by notching a stick, but he lost the stick and he had about given up in despair when the schooner arrived. In the meantime other parties, including some of our naval employees, have been planning to excavate Cocos, but so far no one has discovered either the buccaner hoard or the Madonna of gold. I am told that concessions can be got from the Costa Rican government if anyone cares to search.

The Hidden Gold of Central America.

There is no doubt that there are great treasures hidden on the island and also on the continental part of Central America. On Mona island \$200,000 worth of silver is buried. This is not far from Porto Rico.

I have myself seen here and at Panama at least a half peck of solid gold images which have been taken from the old grave mounds of Central America. No one knows who buried them and some suppose that they date back for hundreds and even thousands of years. I saw a quart of these images in the bank of Ehrman & Co. in Panama City, and I am told that Minor C. Keith has a collection of them in New York which is worth several hundred thousand dollars.

I took a photograph of the images in the Panama bank. They are of all sizes from that of a man's thumb nail to the palm of your hand. Some of them are quite heavy and the gold in them must be worth several hundred dollars. Some represent frogs, others birds and some are women with a hawk head of Hathor, or what looks very much like it. Indeed, the most of the images have an Egyptian cast and they remind one of the treasures found in the pyramids. The most of these came from the Chiriqui province in the northern part of the Panama republic, where it joins Costa Rica.

I am told that a large part of the Keith collection came from Costa Rica, and that they are now finding some about the gulf of Costa Rica. At San Jose there is a jeweler who has some of these images for sale, and down here at Punta Arenas I have been offered two very fine ones for \$30 and \$40 apiece. I should judge that this equals just about half the value of the gold in them. Dr. Spencer Franklin, who has been here for a while, says that they are probably one or two thousand years old.

The workmanship on these images is exquisite. Some of them are beautifully carved and some are lifelike in feature. Among the treasures of Mr. Ehrman are a great many breast plates of solid gold. These are round disks with a nipple in the center ranging in diameter from two to six inches. The gold is a thin plate and is unalloyed. He has also a bracelet which would fit around the biceps of a prize fighter and which is about four inches wide. This is also of solid gold.

I understand that many such images are being discovered and that in all cases they come from these grave mounds of the past.

Gold Buried in Lakes.

Some of the lakes of the Central American highlands are said to contain treasures put there by the Indians at the time they were persecuted by the Spaniards. There is one on the top of a mountain in Colombia, not far from Panama, out of which images like those I have described have been taken. The

most of them have been found near the shore, and it is said that a party of Englishmen are now planning to drain the lake and mine the bed for the treasures. They are making a tunnel to let off the water.

I heard of similar treasure hoards in the same region of South America. There is one in Ecuador said to contain the treasures of the Incas, and another in Peru, where it is claimed that something like \$10,000,000 worth of gold was stowed at the time Pizarro broke faith with Atahualpa and caused his death.

You may remember part of the story. Pizarro had conquered Peru and was king away the silver by the shipload. That metal was so common that the Spaniards had their horses shod with it. It was at this time that Pizarro, the Spanish general, had captured the Incas king Atahualpa, who was also a sort of a prophet and high priest of the people. He offered to ransom the latter if the Indians would fill the room in which the king was imprisoned with gold.

The room was 17 feet wide, 26 feet long and nine feet high. The gold was brought in in great quantities. It comprised gold plates torn from the Temple of the Sun of Cuzco, gold vases, basins and hundreds of drinking cups and dishes of various kinds. There was so much of it that it took the Indians a whole month, working day and night, to cast it into ingots, and so much that it filled the room, as Pizarro demanded. After Pizarro got the gold he treacherously killed the king, and it is said that the Indians then gathered together such gold as they had and buried it in that unknown lake.

There are said to be gold hoards at the bottom of Lake Titicaca, but that can never be drained. There are other gold hoards in the nitrate fields farther south, and indeed no one knows just where the greatest treasures of the past lie. It is very probable that there is some on the isthmus of Panama, and the excavation of old Panama City, which is about to begin when the new road there is completed, will unearth some which were hidden at the time that Morazan took and destroyed the city. Morazan is said to have taken away 150 horseloads of jewels, silver and gold, and he tortured the people to make them confess where the money was hidden.

The Pearl Islands.

If treasures are found at old Pan-

ama it is not improbable that jewels and pearls may be found among them. The waters surrounding Panama and other parts of Central America have long been noted for their magnificent pearls. Some of those in the crown of Spain came from here, and in the cathedrals in Seville and Toledo which the early explorers took from the Indians, Columbus met natives wearing ropes of pearls while he was in this part of the world, and he took one pearl weighing 300 grains home to the queen. Cortez found black pearls which came from the waters of Lower California, while Ferdinand De Soto is said to have robbed one of the Indian queens of a great string of fine pearls.

There are pearl fisheries just outside Panama bay and the diving is going on now. I find pearls for sale here in Punta Arenas and the waiters at the hotel tables will untie knots in their handkerchiefs and ask you to buy them between bites. Some of the pearls are only seeds, but others are as big as a pea. In the stores you will see little bottles of pearls which can be bought by the lot for all sorts of prices, but as a rule the pearls are either very small or not perfectly round. I was told that one was taken out a few years ago which weighed 10 carats and I have heard of another which a 12 year old boy found in an oyster and sold for \$4000. It was taken to Panama and there sold to a banker and in time it reached Paris, where it was valued at \$12,000. Not long ago some pearls were found near Canal Sanatorium on Tiboro Island, and one of them brought \$2500.

The most of the pearls, however, come from the Pearl Islands, which lie on the west side of Panama bay, about 20 miles from the isthmus on which we are now building the fortifications which command the western end of the Panama. There are 16 of these islands, the most of them small. They are populated chiefly by the Indians, who are engaged in pearl diving. The men use diving suits and they bring up the pearl oysters in the shell, after the shells are on board the boats they are opened and the oysters are searched over for pearls, the shells being cleaned and sold to make buttons, knife handles and other such things in which mother of pearl is employed. I am told that the shells are worth about as much as the pearls and that they are the sure parts of the profit. The divers may work for days without finding a

pearl, but the shells always sell, and it is on that account that the business is profitable. In talking with one of the dealers here I asked him whether it was true that pearls could be made by putting a grain of sand inside an oyster so that it irritated its flesh and made it secrete the solution which composes the pearl. He replied that he had no faith in the theory and that he had found pearls of considerable size in very young oysters and that there was no rule as to just where they were laid.

A pearl is like an onion. It is made of a series of coats and you can grind off the outside one to find those within intact. As a rule the pearls now found are small and not of great value, although there is no telling when fine ones may be discovered.

I am told that Pearl Islands have been fished for pearls for almost 300 years, and that pearl fishing is carried on all along this coast from southern California to Mexico. The black pearls of the Gulf of Lower California have been exported since the days of Cortez and more than 1200 ounces were shipped to Spain in one year. That was in 1715. About two years ago a diver found a pearl as large as a partridge egg, and it was sent to Paris, where it sold for \$5000. That pearl was of a light steel color, but greenish black at the base.

On the other side of the isthmus pearls have been found off the coast of South America. It is said that Venezuela is producing something like \$600,000 worth every year. It is that region which is called the "Gulf of Pearls" and it was from there on the island of Margarita that a pearl of 250 carats was taken in 1578. That pearl was worth perhaps \$50,000. Another gem which adorns the Spanish crown came from the waters of Mexico. It weighs 400 grains.

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